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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 005100

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/10/2014

TAGS: [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: MFA PROTESTS TURKMEN CASUALTIES IN TAL AFAR

Classified By: Classified By: A/DCM James Moore. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: The Director General for Middle East Affairs summoned A/DCM to the MFA the evening of September 9 to express strong concern about Turkmen civilian casualties being incurred during current operations against insurgents in Tal Afar. The protest was motivated by anticipated political fallout and public reaction in light of the Foreign Minister,s September 8 press statement that U.S./coalition operations against insurgents last weekend in Tal Afar were not directed at the Turkmen population. In a separate conversation with the Ambassador, the MFA Deputy Undersecretary for Political Affairs said that fallout from the operation in Tal Afar could jeopardize Turkey,s overall cooperation with the U.S. on Iraq. The GOT is not objecting to the operation per se, but rather is warning that Turkmen civilian casualties could have a significant enough impact on public opinion to undermine GOT efforts to continue cooperation with us on Iraq. End summary.

12. (C) MFA Middle East Political Affairs DG Tahsin Burcuoglu called in A/DCM to convey the message from Foreign Minister Gul, who is traveling in Estonia, that today,s operations in Tal Afar put the GOT in a highly sensitive position. Gul, as well as MFA spokesperson Namik Tan, stated September 8 that last weekend,s operations by U.S./coalition forces against insurgents in Tal Afar were in no way directed against the Turkmen population.

13. (C) The Foreign Minister,s request, as conveyed by Burcuoglu, is that U.S./coalition forces in Tal Afar not use excessive force and that all possible measures be taken to prevent civilian casualties. A/DCM emphasized that operations were targeting insurgents, that every effort was being taken to avoid collateral casualties, that U.S. military liaison officers were in contact with Turkish Special Forces in Tal Afar, and that large numbers of civilians left the area ahead of the fighting. He told Burcuoglu that Gul,s statement was absolutely true as regards last weekend,s skirmishes and the current fighting.

14. (C) Underlining the sensitivity of the situation as perceived by the GOT, Foreign Minister Gul, Burcuoglu reported, telephoned Secretary Powell this afternoon to convey Turkish concerns, but was unable to speak with him. In addition, as A/DCM was enroute to MFA, Deputy Undersecretary for Political Affairs Ali Tuygan phoned the Ambassador to raise the same set of concerns. Tuygan told the Ambassador the current situation in Tal Afar could undermine Turkey,s overall cooperation with the U.S. in Iraq. The Ambassador replied that in the first instance it was important to determine the facts on the ground in Tal Afar and not react to rumors. Ambassador told Tuygan the operation was aimed at insurgents and not the Turkmen population but that his understanding was that some number of the insurgents were, in fact, Shia Turkmen. He also told Tuygan that he believed efforts were in train to keep Turkish Special Forces in Northern Iraq informed as the operation unfolded. Ambassador undertook to provide fuller information to the MFA as it became available.

15. (C) DG Burcuoglu said that an operation in Tal Afar in which Turkmen civilians are killed makes it difficult for his government to explain why the U.S. is not taking action against the PKK in northern Iraq. He also cited unconfirmed reports that Kurdish groups in Tal Afar are providing false information to U.S./coalition troops that would lead them to mistakenly target Turkmen civilians.

16. (C) Comment: In the face of extensive and often exaggerated media coverage of Turkmen casualties in Tal Afar last weekend, the MFA in its September 8 statements was attempting to be constructive. The current fighting appears to have unnerved the GOT, and it comes on the heels of significant concern over several recent hostage takings and killings of Turkish truck drivers in Iraq. U/S Tuygan,s remark that the current offensive could undermine Turkish cooperation with the U.S. across the board in Iraq shows how threatened the GOT feels by the prospect of significant civilian Turkmen casualties. The MFA did not dispute the need to confront insurgent forces in Tal Afar; rather, their concern is based on the political fallout and negative public opinion they believe will be generated by further Turkmen casualties, and how this could make working with us on other Iraq-related initiatives much more difficult.

End comment.

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